

SDS Should Promote the Teaching of Disability Studies in Institutions of Higher Education

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The Society for Disability Studies over the next ten years should promote the introduction and development of courses and modules in other courses on disability studies. We should begin with existing SDS members in the USA and Canada. We can not limit ourselves to just the USA and Canada, but they are the places to start and to eventually expand.

Disability studies today is viewed as sex education was in the 1950s. Like sex was, disability is present, but hidden. Everybody will experience disability sometime in their future if not now, but people will not talk openly about it. For some people the experience will be for a few minutes prior to dying from a massive heart attack or something similar. For most people disability will be a long term episode not always later in life. However, many people refuse to think about and to analyze the phenomenon. Since it is a major experience in life it is important to offer courses in disability studies in colleges and universities.

In order to do so we must start with present SDS members. Those who are not presently teaching a disability studies course should be assisted in whatever way necessary. But we must recognize that some of our colleagues are presently compelled to devote their attention to obtaining and keeping employment in higher education and can not at this time introduce or even advocate for the introduction of disability studies courses. SDS members who are in a position to do so should be identified and should be extended whatever assistance the Society can muster.

This assistance can take many forms. Some need only a starting point and advice on strategy as the process goes on. Others need syllabi and texts. Financial assistance (summer time, sabbatical time, or released time during the year) will be needed by almost everyone. If the idea is not funded by some outside source, academic administrators will not take it seriously. SDS can offer its support as THE professional academic group in the area.

I do not mean to leave out agency people and others who do not have the opportunity to teach on the post-secondary level. Actually many of you do if you are willing to be low-wage slaves as adjuncts. In every one of my disability studies courses over the last fifteen years I have always had someone from the field come to the class. It was not until the closing years of my time at Suffolk that I actually had adjuncts in the field developing disability studies courses.

I do not intend to ignore research in disability studies. Most good teachers are also good researchers. Most good researchers are good teachers. The two should go hand-in-hand, but realistically most of us get paid for teaching and not research. It only took me 42 years to break out of that mold. My strategy is to get disability studies courses and modules in the curriculum which will stimulate the need for research in the field.

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